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SUBJECT: VISIT TO KWARA STATE

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INTRANET OR INTERNET.

11. (SBU) Summary: Governing Kwara State, like some other states, is a family affair. Governor Bukola Saraki's father is the political kingmaker in Kwara, having handpicked the previous two governors and arranged for his daughter to be elected to the Senate in the same April elections that sent his son to the statehouse. Poloff traveled to Kwara in September to visit the Governor, the Kwara PDP chairman and other local officials; the meetings were interesting, but among them only Governor Saraki appeared to have any real power or knowledge of what is really going on in the state. Federal (national government) institutions are powerful in the states' affairs, and state governors played a role in the nominations for this year's national elections. Governor Saraki was knowledgeable and interested in Federal politics, and believes the Presidency in 2007 is VP Atiku's to lose. End Summary.

Governor Bukola Saraki

12. (SBU) Governor Saraki is in his forties and comes from a private sector background, having worked in his father's bank (Societe Generale) for several years. He studied in London and attained a degree in general practice medicine, the same degree as his father. He is a Muslim. Prior to his election as Governor, he had never held political office. His father, former Senator Olu Saraki, is much better known and is widely regarded as the political godfather and kingmaker in the state. Olu Saraki has run for President three times, handpicked the last two governors of Kwara State, as well as arranged for his daughter to be elected to the Senate in April.

100 Days

13. (U) Saraki made sure to demonstrate the steps he has already taken to improve life in his state. He stated that there were more than 1000 non-functioning water well boreholes in the state when he took office, and his administration has already repaired/refurbished 200 of them. He also mentioned an ambitious goal of creating 1000 farms in the state on a sharecropping basis -- the government would rent out the land in exchange for a cut of the sale of produce. He claimed to have cleaned up the capital, Ilorin, and fixed the majority of potholes. The city was indeed cleaner than it had been during Poloff's March visit, but potholes were still there in many places.

Future Goals

14. (U) Saraki firmly believes that private investment is the panacea for all of Nigeria's problems. He raised as an example the pending importation ban on rice in 2006, stating that the GON should invite foreign companies to build factories here in advance of the ban instead of just hoping domestic industry will take advantage of the opening and blossom. Saraki bemoaned the fact that Kwara is only 34th among Nigeria's 36 states in revenue allocation from Nigeria's Federal Government, and is determined to invite outside investment directly. A new flourmill of the Dangote group was one result. In order to keep that investment and create even more jobs, Saraki has also commissioned the building of a factory to produce the flour bags, and an increase in the number of trucks available for hauling the flour out of state. The Governor also stated that all trucks driving north from Lagos have to pass through Ilorin, and he is also looking to increase the number of petrol stations and

the quality of the hotels in order to get drivers to stop and stay in the city.

Farmers From Zimbabwe and South Africa

15. (U) Contrary to media reports, Kwara State will not be accepting groups of dispossessed white farmers from Zimbabwe and South Africa as refugees. Five farmers representing a larger farming investment group in the two countries visited Kwara recently in order to assess the investment climate. Two specialized in cattle rearing, one in chicken farming, and two in vegetable farming. Saraki discussed their coming to Kwara to build a chicken and cattle rearing industry. Kwara State would provide land and tax breaks in exchange for a plant and technological know-how. According to Saraki, Kwara receives significantly more rainfall and has a better overall climate for all types of farming than does South Africa.

Education

16. (U) Another focus for Saraki is education. He expressed dissatisfaction with the local Koranic schools, stating that they had seriously declined in the past decade and now are not teaching English, Math and the Sciences at an appropriate level for their students to succeed. Saraki claimed that only ten percent of graduating secondary school students in Ilorin are able to qualify for entrance to the University of Ilorin. In addition to requiring stricter standards, Saraki has begun shutting down non-registered "bush" schools around the state capital.

National Issues

17. (SBU) PolOff also discussed several national issues with the Governor to get his perspective and gauge the involvement of a fairly representative governor. On the coup against the governor of Anambra state, Saraki agreed that the situation had made all the governors nervous. He was not especially worried for himself, as he feels he has complete control of Kwara. Saraki believes that there will be a "test" constitutional amendment soon on one or another relatively minor issue so the PDP can judge whether its overwhelming majority in the National Assembly and among the governors is capable of gaining more substantial changes to the constitution. Saraki also believes that the National Assembly currently has little to no real power to oppose the President on any issue and that this situation will continue as long as the current Assembly leadership is in place.

18. (SBU) On the 2007 elections, Saraki believes that the Presidency is Atiku's to lose. He said Atiku had played the role of conciliatory mother to Obasanjo's stern disciplinarian father in relationships with the governors, and had earned many points around the country. Saraki also believes that Obasanjo will not support any single candidate in the 2007 presidential election, even his own PDP's candidate, but will rather try to remain neutral in order to create the image of national statesman for himself.

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